



Engaging the Power of the Press

Positive Media Relations
for WorkFirst Staff

WorkFirst deserves attention.
You can help.

Engaging the Power of the Press

Positive Media Relations for WorkFirst Staff

“Let's not stop until every WorkFirst participant has a family-wage job.”

Governor Gary Locke

October 6, 1999

W A S H I N G T O N

WorkFirst

**Washington State Employment Security Department
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Introduction:

The Importance of Positive Media Relations

“Whoever controls the media -- the images -- controls the culture.”

-- Allen Ginsberg, poet

The phone rings. A reporter from *Big News* is seeking information for a story. She needs it now.

Such a situation can seem intimidating, especially for someone who hasn't much experience in dealing with the press. But it's also an ideal opportunity to better educate news professionals and the public about important programs such as WorkFirst, Washington's welfare reform strategy.

Frankly, good press relations should be in everyone's job description. It's critical that all media inquiries be handled quickly, efficiently and professionally.

Be Proactive

By taking a proactive approach in communicating with media, WorkFirst managers have the best chance of getting out the message about the program's accomplishments, challenges and

successes, as well as helping others understand their interesting work.

Be Positive

By drawing attention to WorkFirst's positive aspects, you can help recruit employers, reach families who need your services and gain public support for new or existing programs.

Be Prepared

Conducting effective media relations takes planning and know-how. The tips in this manual are designed to help you better understand how a news agency operates and your role in the news process.

Practice Your New Skills

With experience, calls from *Big News* will become less intimidating. You may even look forward to them

1: Understanding the Media

“It’s amazing the amount of news that happens in the world every day always just exactly fits the newspaper.”

-- Jerry Seinfeld, actor/comedian

Every day, organizations statewide participate in countless activities that could be covered by the media. But only a few make the morning paper or the evening news. Usually, groups that get coverage are the ones that look for angles that meet the media's needs: inform, advise, entertain and make a profit.

What is News?

Characteristics that make information newsworthy include:

- ❑ Timeliness
- ❑ Local impact
- ❑ Widespread impact
- ❑ Conflict
- ❑ Famous/important people
- ❑ Human interest/emotional appeal
- ❑ Novelty
- ❑ Extremes (eg: largest, smallest, first)
- ❑ Exposé

You’re Needed

“In all honesty, Johnny, we are often at the mercy of the White House for the news we report. Frequently, we simply repeat verbatim what the White House tells us.”

-- Connie Chung to Johnny Carson

If you remember only one thing from this manual, make it this: You are needed. You have something the reporter wants -- information. How the press uses that is out of your control. But you have the responsibility to give accurate information and the freedom to tell the story as you see it.

Simply understanding your role in the news process will give you an advantage every time you communicate with the press.

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Roles

- ❑ The reporter is the messenger/story teller.
- ❑ You are the expert. You represent your organization.
- ❑ The audience consists of readers or viewers.

Know Your Audience

When dealing with the media, it's essential to identify your target audience and tailor your message for them. In addition to reporters, potential audiences for WorkFirst issues include:

- ❑ Social service agencies and organizations
- ❑ Government bodies and elected officials
- ❑ Low-income families
- ❑ Taxpayers
- ❑ Employers
- ❑ Economists
- ❑ Welfare reform advocates

Reporters are People Too

Most reporters are genuinely concerned about fairness and accuracy.

Many news agencies strive to adhere to a voluntary code of ethics developed by The Society of Professional Journalists.

SPJ's code says journalists should:

- ❑ Seek Truth and Report It
- ❑ Minimize Harm
- ❑ Act Independently
- ❑ Be Accountable

The complete text can be read on the society's Web site at www.spj.org.

Notes

Engaging the Power of the Press

Build Relationships

Personal contact is the best way to get a reporter's attention. A reporter who likes and trusts you is more likely to listen.

Here are some basic steps to help build a positive working relationship:

- ❑ Call your local news agencies and ask which reporter covers the welfare field. Since “welfare” is seldom a specific beat, your contact may cover business, social issues or government or have a general assignment beat.
- ❑ Invite reporters to coffee so that you can get to know each other. This is effective even when you don't have a story to pitch. Keep the meeting short and don't be offended if they insist on paying their own tab. (Many news organizations have strict rules against accepting gifts or other freebies.)
- ❑ Let reporters know when they write something you like, even if it's not about you.

Notes

2: One Size Doesn't Fit All

A savvy job applicant tailors a résumé to each position. Likewise, a savvy public information officer tailors communications strategies to each news agency. One size doesn't fit all. Here are some general differences among news agencies:

Newspapers

Newspapers aim to tell the whole story. Because they have more room to explain things, they're generally the best arena for comprehensive and complex articles.

Newspapers have learned that to compete with broadcast media, they need to tell the story differently. Newspaper reporters will often spend more time interviewing sources and gathering details than will broadcast reporters, who must relay news in a matter of minutes or even seconds.

Newspaper articles have an everlasting quality that broadcast news can't match. News clippings are often shared with friends, relatives and co-workers and many times are kept for years.

Network Television

Television stations aim to tell the news first and therefore put a heavy focus on timeliness.

On-camera interviews and interesting footage are especially important to television news, which relies heavily on pictures to tell a story.

Whether a story is covered largely depends on what else is happening that day. Even an event deemed as a low priority can make the news on an otherwise "slow" day. So it's good to call and remind stations on the day of an event.

Radio

Radio stations also aim to tell the news first. Because radio is not a visual medium, focus is placed on "sound bites" – concise, punchy quotes that lend color to a story.

Even radio stations lacking reporters to cover local news will often air public service announcements.

(See Chapter 4 for a description of a public service announcement.)

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Online Publications

Many newspapers and broadcast stations have Web editions. Usually but not always, the news that appears on the site is the same as appears in the paper or is broadcast.

A number of Internet-only news agencies have also emerged in recent years.

Like newspaper articles, stories published on the Internet have an eternal quality. They can easily be passed along via e-mail, enabling the news to spread far and wide.

Special-Interest

Publications

Publications with an emphasis on minority issues, business, women's issues and other special-interest topics are often overlooked by professionals seeking news coverage.

However, they have the ability to reach non-English readers and employers who can benefit from WorkFirst programs.

Many will run a press release or guest article nearly verbatim. Some non-English publications have employees capable of translating press releases.

Magazines

Magazines, like newspapers, are looking to tell the whole story. And they have more space to do so.

Magazines have the unique ability to catch the attention of a select group of subscribers interested in a particular topic, as well as general audiences who may not follow the daily news. Many are flipped through by folks waiting at the doctor's office or in the grocery line.

Public Access Television

Public, Educational and Government (PEG) Access cable television stations are different than commercial networks. They generally don't have reporters. But most will air public service announcements (See Chapter 4 for a description.) and brief news items at no charge. These can appear as scrolling text messages or video clips. Some stations also have community news programs.

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Community Size

Large Cities

Generally, newspapers and stations in larger cities are more selective about the news they cover.

Because these agencies have the ability to deliver news to many people, they are a powerful tool for communicating your story. Even a news brief that reaches an audience of 100,000 or more can be extremely valuable.

To get the attention of a metropolitan newspaper or station, you should be able to convince a reporter that your story is interesting to many people.

Small Cities

Similarly, a feature circulated among 5,000 readers can make a significant impact. News typically ignored by bigger papers will often make the front page of a small community paper. Many community papers will run a press release or guest article nearly verbatim.

Stories pitched to community papers should have a local angle.

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3: Relaying WorkFirst's Message

“Washington’s ‘WorkFirst’ (TANF) Act creates a sound foundation for a welfare program that reflects the common sense, mainstream values of the people of this state: hard work, hope and opportunity for all. It creates an innovative work-based program that promises to reduce poverty, and to help people get jobs and sustain economic independence. At the same time, it reflects the desire of the people of this state to protect children and those who are unable to work.”

-- Governor Gary Locke

when signing WorkFirst into law on April 17, 1997

Reporters value local experts.
Nobody knows your programs
better than you do.

Be an Expert

- ❑ Share your positive impressions about WorkFirst whenever you have the opportunity.
- ❑ Know your programs.
- ❑ Monitor the WorkFirst Web site at www.wa.gov/workfirst and your local performance data for current information.
- ❑ Monitor local news.

WorkFirst's Motto

WorkFirst's motto is “a job, a better job, a better life.”

WorkFirst is Not Welfare

WorkFirst is an employment program. It helps families become self-sufficient by providing experience, training and support services needed to get a job, keep a job and move up a career ladder.

WorkFirst Aims to Reduce Poverty

The route out of poverty starts with getting a job. WorkFirst is based on the belief that everyone has abilities needed in today’s workforce, and those who can work should. WorkFirst helps people recognize and use their strengths to succeed.

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Work Pays with WorkFirst

Participants are always financially better off working than if they receive only a welfare grant because half their job earnings aren't counted as income against public assistance.

WorkFirst Supports

Participants and Families

The program pays for college tuition, employment training, childcare, transportation and work attire. It also connects families to medical aid, food stamps, tax credits and other assistance.

WorkFirst is Flexible

WorkFirst recognizes that one size does not fit all. Service plans are custom-tailored to fit the needs of participants and employers.

Partners Make WorkFirst

WorkFirst is based on a partnership of among state agencies, educators, labor unions, tribes, community organizations, employers and program participants. Collaboration is the key to WorkFirst's success.

WorkFirst Gives Back

WorkFirst is reinvesting savings into the things working parents need most. Caseload reductions enabled the state to triple funds to help families pay for childcare.

WorkFirst is Committed to Improvement

WorkFirst is committed to continuous improvement. Every year, WorkFirst partners learn more about how to effectively combat poverty – one family at a time.

Current efforts are focused on how to help people move from “a job” to “a better job,” ensure that no one is left behind when the five-year benefit limit is reached, and simplify and streamline program requirements.

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4: Sell Your Story

“Half the American people never read a newspaper. Half never voted for president.

One hopes it is the same half.”

-- Gore Vidal, writer

Selling a story to the media is about smart marketing. It’s getting the right message to the right people at the right time.

People who appear in photos should preferably be central to the story and whenever possible, show people in action.

Develop a News Hook

How will you convince the media that your story is worth their attention? Determine the story's newsworthiness. Remember that giving a reporter a local angle always increases your chances of coverage.

Not-So-Interesting Photos

Ground-breakings, check-passings, ribbon-cuttings, buildings under construction, meetings where everyone is seated, posed portraits.

Think Pictures

What photo opportunities or graphics would help tell your story? A captivating photo increases your chances of coverage. Visuals are especially important for television.

Better Photo Ideas

A WorkFirst client on the job, job fairs, training programs with hands-on activities, anything with children, public appearances of well-known people.

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Write a Press Release

Much of the news that is printed or broadcast originates with press releases. Your news release may be the only information a reporter sees on an issue.

Musts for an Effective Press Release

- ❑ The first paragraph should give all the basics: who, what, where, when and why.
- ❑ Include the name, number and e-mail address for at least one knowledgeable contact. Listing multiple contacts and an after-hours number such as a home number, pager or cell phone ensures that reporters on tight deadlines can reach someone quickly.
- ❑ Include one or two pertinent quotes.
- ❑ Write a headline that grabs the reporter's attention.

Use the Inverted Pyramid Format

There's always a chance your press release could appear in the news exactly you wrote it. Therefore, write it like a short story. Summarize the essential details at the top. Less important information follows.

Keep It Simple

Avoid jargon, acronyms and technical mumbo-jumbo. Define terms like WorkFirst and TANF. Never assume that your audience is familiar with your programs.

Image is Everything

Mention photo opportunities and include relevant graphics. (But remember that graphics and photos often don't fax well.)

Little Things Matter

- ❑ Limit the release to one double-spaced typed page, if possible. Use a font type and size that can be easily read.
- ❑ Type ### or END at the end of your document. If the press release is two pages (never longer!), type MORE on the first.
- ❑ Ask another person to read your message carefully. Check for clarity and accuracy.

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Honor Deadlines

- ❑ Know the new agency's deadline and stick to it. Remember that a reporter's schedule is often full days in advance. So send your press release out early -- about a week before an event for daily newspapers and broadcast stations and earlier for weeklies and monthlies.
- ❑ Send the press release to a specific person.
- ❑ E-mail and fax are most efficient but some smaller papers prefer snail mail, so ask in advance. When sending e-mail, avoid sending attachments, which sometimes can't be opened by the recipient's software. Instead, imbed the text into the body of the e-mail message.

Follow Up

Call to make sure your press release was received. Reporters and editors often take the time to read your press release simply because you called.

Pitch Calls

Calling a reporter or news agency to notify or remind them of an event or announcement is an accepted practice. By making personal contact, you're assured your message was received. And since reporters are always looking to scoop their competition, they often will be more receptive to your "tip" than to a press release. Plus, it's another chance to develop a relationship.

- ❑ Keep the conversation short.
- ❑ Immediately state your name, organization, job title and reason for calling.
- ❑ Convey enthusiasm for the story.
- ❑ Call early in the day to avoid catching the reporter on deadline.

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Scheduling Events

Try to schedule your events and activities around media deadlines. Midmorning, around 10 a.m., is ideal because most newspaper reporters are at work by then and broadcast reporters can usually make the noon show. Early afternoon is also fine. Midweek days tend to be the least hectic. Avoid scheduling your activity at the same time as another prominent community event.

Media Advisories

When information must be withheld from the media until a certain day, send a media advisory a few days in advance to alert reporters about what's to come.

- ❑ The advisory should contain the who, what, where, when and why and a contact name and number.
- ❑ Follow with a detailed press release on the day of the event.

Community and Business

Calendars

Some newspapers run calendars of upcoming events. Submit your event to the appropriate person and remember that deadlines can be as much as three weeks before publication for some dailies.

Public Service

Announcements

Public Service Announcements (P.S.A.s) are short radio or television messages aired on behalf of community organizations.

- ❑ They must not include controversial or self-serving material.
- ❑ Keep your message short (30 seconds).
- ❑ Include a phone number the listener can call for additional information.

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Editorials and Commentaries

While you can't control the content of an editorial, it's worth trying to get a positive endorsement of your worthy programs. Here's how:

- ❑ Set up a meeting with the person or group responsible for forming the opinions of the news agency. This could be an editorial board, opinion writer or columnist, radio or TV commentator or the host of a local talk show.
- ❑ Know whom you are dealing with. Read newspapers, watch broadcasts and ask others who may be familiar with the person's work. Is the editorial writer or commentator known to express positive or negative opinions about WorkFirst?
- ❑ Arrive at the meeting prepared to pitch your program, idea, event, etc. Keep your spiel short and concise.
- ❑ Bring a business card, written materials and visual aids.
- ❑ Be prepared to answer difficult questions.
- ❑ Remember to thank the person for their time.

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Guest Columns/Articles

Guest columns and articles are similar to other opinion and news works except you are the writer. Although your work will likely be edited for clarity and space, you can expect to largely have control of the content.

- Find out the news agency's policy on guest columns and editorials. Do they run them? Is there a required length? Indicate you'd like to submit an article and ask for instructions.
- Weekly newspapers and community bulletins are usually looking to fill space and often welcome submissions.
- Many newspapers have annual “progress” editions -- special supplements often published primarily for advertising revenue that include news articles about industry trends, community growth and other issues. Sometimes people who work in those fields write these articles. Ask if your local newspaper has such an edition and volunteer to write an article or be a contact for how WorkFirst is operating in the community.

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Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor generally attract a narrower readership than news articles but tend to draw the attention of decision-makers.

- ❑ Save your opportunities to write a letter to the editor for important occasions.
- ❑ The shorter the letter, the more likely it will be printed. Check your newspaper's editorial page for the maximum length allowed.
- ❑ Make your most important point in the first or second paragraph.
- ❑ If the letter responds to a particular article or another letter, refer to the title, date and author of the original piece in your opening sentence.
- ❑ Sign your name and include a phone number.

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Press Conferences

Reporters generally don't like press conferences and most stories that appear in the news don't warrant them. Hold a press conference only when you think the news is important enough to convince even the busiest reporter to attend.

- ❑ Send a news release three days to a week in advance.
- ❑ Follow-up with phone calls the day before the conference, urging reporters to attend.
- ❑ Choose a convenient and appropriate location.
- ❑ Schedule the conference to coordinate with media deadlines. Mid-morning or early afternoon is ideal. Mid-week days tend to be less hectic.
- ❑ Prepare speakers. Review the messages you want to convey. Rehearse their presentation.
- ❑ Create media kits including news releases, biographies of guest speakers, visuals and other pertinent materials to have on hand.
- ❑ Display visuals.
- ❑ Keep it short - 30 minutes max. Allow time for questions

5: When a Reporter Calls You

Every media call is important. What matters most, though, is your response.

Never Ignore a Media

Inquiry

- ❑ Respond to calls promptly, even if it's to say, "I'll need to find out the answer and call you back."
- ❑ You can buy time to prepare a response by simply saying you're in the middle of a task and need to call the reporter back.

Ask About the Story

Inquire why the reporter is calling. Determine what information he/she is seeking. Feel free to ask questions about the story – "What's the story about?" "What story are you trying to tell?" "Who else have you interviewed?" "Who will you interview?"

Honor Deadlines

Always ask for the reporter's deadline and honor it. Get back reporter within an hour, if possible.

Provide Information

- ❑ If the reporter asks for information that is a public record, share it.
- ❑ Offer additional information that supports the positive aspects of WorkFirst.

Notify Your Public

Information Officer

Whenever possible, contact your organization's public information officer before responding if you suspect the story will be sensitive or negative. You can also contact Kristin Alexander, WorkFirst media relations coordinator.

6: Interviewing

Associating a friendly face with your organization is one of the best reasons to agree to an interview. And reporters really want to talk to you, the expert.

Prepare and Take Notes

- ❑ Never go into an interview cold. List the points you want to make and have them handy for reference.
- ❑ Record or take notes on any interview. They'll help you remember what you said.
- ❑ If you plan to record the interview, be sure to ask for the reporter's permission – just as a reporter must have your permission to record the interview.

Use Sound Bites

- ❑ Speak slowly, enunciate and use short, colorful quotes. Reporters are always looking for “sound bites.”
- ❑ Add interest and credibility to your interview by including analogies, examples, statistics, personal experiences and expert opinions.

- ❑ Keep your message simple; avoid jargon and bureaucratic language. It's more confusing than impressive.
- ❑ Remember who your audience is.

Stick to Your Point

- ❑ Challenge a reporter's efforts to put words in your mouth.
- ❑ If you finish answering a question and the reporter remains silent, don't feel pressured to elaborate. It may only dilute your message. Instead ask, “Have I answered your question?”

Speak About What

You Know

- ❑ Always be truthful and accurate. Don't speculate or exaggerate.
- ❑ There's no penalty in pausing to think and no sin in saying, “I don't know.”
- ❑ If you aren't comfortable talking on the subject, don't. But be sure to refer the reporter to someone who can address the issue.

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Don't Argue

“I never argue with people who buy their ink by the barrel.”

-- Mark Twain

Never get mad, defame others or argue with a reporter.

About “Off the Record”

Assume everything you say to a reporter is on the record. Off the record comments have been known to appear in stories and savvy reporters will seek out other sources to confirm the information. So if you really don't want it printed or aired, then don't say it.

“No Comment” is a No-No

- ❑ Never say “no comment” which may be interpreted as evasiveness.
- ❑ If you cannot answer a question, make sure the reporter understands why. For example, you might say, “I'm sorry but that information is protected under our agency's policies concerning client confidentiality.”

Be Camera-Ready

- ❑ Expect to be filmed or photographed. Television reporters need visuals.
- ❑ For television interviews, avoid wearing patterns and shiny fabrics.
- ❑ Consider applying foundation or powder to your face to reduce shine. Women should wear moderate make-up.

Body Language

- ❑ Look at whomever is speaking to you, not directly at the camera.
- ❑ Be aware of your body language. Don't sway or fidget.
- ❑ When outside, stand so you aren't squinting in the sun.

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Answers to Difficult Interview Questions

Be alert to tricky interview questions and reply appropriately.

The False Alternative

Example: “Was your decision based on monopolistic practice or did you just not know?”

Solution: Ignore the alternatives and focus on your message. Lead the interviewer rather than allowing him or her to lead you. “The root of your question is motivation...”

The Hypothetical

Example: “If __ happens, what will you do?”

Solution: Avoid speculation. Turn the conversation to a positive point. “I don't have a crystal ball, but...”

The Loaded Preface

Example: “Your company has been called inept by the unions. So what are you doing about the layoffs?”

Solution: Try to correct the perception and then move on to the positive. “On the contrary, we...”

The Absent Party

Example: “So-and-so has stated that your organization is behind the times...”

Solution: Don't argue with someone who is not present. Instead of commenting on that specific statement, turn to something else. “I'm not familiar with that remark, but we...”

The Inconsistency

Example: “In 1997, you said _____ ; now you're doing _____. Why the change?”

Solution: Take an historical perspective. “The environment was different in 1997 and we...”

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The Irrelevancy

Example: “As President of XYZ Co. and an avid runner, what are you doing about running safety...?”

Solution: Give a bit of information about running and then bridge to your major issues.

Putting Words in Your Mouth

Example: Did you abuse your wife? Answer: I have never abused my wife. Headline: CEO says he did not abuse wife.

Solution: Do not repeat inflammatory words that a reporter might feed to you. Rather, answer in neutral terms. “That is a question that I will not dignify with an answer.” *

Used with permission from Robert Marston and Associates and Online-pr.com

* Note from Kristin Alexander:

The suggested answer given in this example might be interpreted as evasiveness.

Consider responding with a positive statement that contradicts the implied wrongdoing.

Answer: “I am opposed to domestic violence.”

Notes

7: Media Relations Beyond the Interview

A successful interview is a huge accomplishment. Here's what else you should do to ensure a positive media relations experience:

Notify Your Public Information Officer

- Notify your Public Information Officer of any news contact as soon as possible. We need to be aware of stories in progress in the event additional information or clarification is needed. Reporters usually talk to more than one source and we want to be sure our messages are consistent.
- Share copies of published articles and recorded broadcasts with us. We keep extensive files and analyze coverage.

Notes

News Isn't Just 9-5

If news breaks at night, newspaper and broadcast reporters could be scrambling to gather facts well after most people are asleep.

For this reason, it's vital to provide reporters with a phone number they can use to reach you after you've left the office.

Even stories that aren't breaking news may require a reporter to reach someone after hours. Newspapers that hit the doorstep in the morning are often printed the evening before. It's not unusual for an editor to ask a reporter to verify information or seek additional details after 5 p.m. The same applies to television and radio reporters, who often are looking for fresh information for their nightly broadcasts.

It may seem inconvenient to be called at home until you consider the possible outcomes of being unavailable – wrong information or a one-sided story that paints a negative picture of WorkFirst.

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Correct Mistakes

If you make a mistake or provide wrong information, correct it immediately. On an opinion, a quick call saying, “I was wrong” sometimes works. Or you can clarify your previous statement.

Confirm Accuracy

Don't expect to preview a story.

However, it's OK to ask a reporter to verify information before it is printed or aired, especially with complex issues.

Don't Sweat Small Stuff

- ❑ Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. If a story contains minor factual errors or omissions, endure it.
- ❑ However, if the story seriously misrepresents your position or misstates an important fact, politely call it to the reporter's attention. Usually if it's important, the reporter will offer to correct it.

- ❑ Never go over a reporter's head to complain to an editor or news executive unless the reporter's response was wholly unsatisfactory or in critical cases when the reporter can't be reached.
- ❑ Remember that you want to build a positive working relationship. It's better to have them owe you than to get even or demand a correction.

Be Realistic

You can't control the content, placement or tone of a story. The press has the responsibility to report the story they way it sees it, not the way you see it.

Ask for Advice

If you ever have questions, concerns or need advice concerning your communication with the media, don't hesitate to call a public information officer or other communications expert.

Notes

8: Crisis Communications

Preventing a crisis is the best media relations strategy. The next best thing is to react to the situation quickly and appropriately.

Plan then Respond

Preparing a media relations plan can prevent stress during a crisis.

- ❑ Designate a spokesperson for crisis situations.
- ❑ Notify your Public Information Officer of any news contact as soon as possible.
- ❑ Always return a reporter's call.
Generally, the more an agency tries to stonewall a reporter, the harder the reporter will dig to get the answer. And if you put off a reporter for too long, the story may indicate that you refused comment.

- ❑ Remember, you can buy time to prepare a response by simply saying you're in the middle of a task and need to call the reporter back, or by asking questions about the story.
- ❑ If necessary, tell the reporter you need to verify the information before you can comment further.
- ❑ Prepare a statement. Write a response, go over it several times with those you trust and then take media calls. If you fear you might get tricked by a difficult question or say too much, issue a written response instead.

Notes

Engaging the Power of the Press

When Bad News Brews

- ❑ The most effective way to quash a bad story or at least minimize its harm is with good information. Be honest and set the record straight.
- ❑ Too frequently, bad news is actually one-sided news. When you learn about a story that could be potentially damaging, use the opportunity to tell the reporter – and the public – about the importance of WorkFirst and its successes.
- ❑ A reporter who is covering an event, such as a forum or public meeting, is usually there to cover the event itself and may not seek comment outside that arena. To get your voice heard, contact the reporter in advance or better, attend the event and speak up.
- ❑ If a news investigation exposes wrongdoing, immediately implement a remedy.
- ❑ Sometimes there's nothing an organization can do to thwart negative news. But by showing concern and determination to resolve the problem, organizations stand the best chance to maintain the public's respect.

The Tylenol Cyanide Crisis

In 1982, someone put capsules with lethal amounts of cyanide in bottles of Tylenol on store shelves. Seven people in Chicago died from ingesting the laced pills.

Johnson & Johnson, makers of Tylenol, immediately launched a public relations campaign to save the reputation of their product and their corporation.

They spent millions recalling all Tylenol bottles from stores, and publicized the recall with full-page newspaper ads and stories.

They offered a \$1,000 reward for the perpetrator's capture.

They also designed a tamper-resistant container. According to reports, the company held a 30-city video press conference just six weeks after the deaths, during which reporters were given samples of the new product.

Consumers could call a toll-free number to request a free replacement bottle of medicine. Newspaper ads included coupons for discounts on Tylenol products.

Johnson & Johnson used the media to show concern and determination to resolve the crisis. They even thanked the press for warning the public about the poisoned drugs.

In the end, they maintained their dominance in the pharmaceutical market.

Conclusion: It's Your Turn

To dream anything that you want to dream. That is the beauty of the human mind.

To do anything that you want to do. That is the strength of the human will.

To trust yourself to test your limits. That is the courage to succeed.

-- Bernard Edmonds, writer

Put what you learned to use. Within the next week, make a real effort to sell a story to a reporter in your community. If you don't try, you will never know what you can accomplish.

Story Ideas

Adapt one of these ideas or come up with one of your own.

- ❑ Profile a participant who found work and is willing to speak positively about WorkFirst.
- ❑ Highlight a business that hires WorkFirst participants.
- ❑ Explain the local implications of state or national welfare legislation. Talk about your reduced caseloads.
- ❑ Arrange for tours of your office. Invite the public and press. Show the system in action.

- ❑ Invite reporters to job fairs and hiring events.
- ❑ Tie WorkFirst to another publicity event or a current topic, such as the changing labor market.
- ❑ Draw attention to a specific WorkFirst educational or vocational training program. Explain how it is making a difference in your community.
- ❑ Inform the media when your agency receives an award or other significant recognition.
- ❑ Invited the media to public meeting or similar setting.

Keep Trying

If your story doesn't get coverage, don't get discouraged. Get to know a reporter better. Discuss your program and the reporter may discover a story that you hadn't thought of. Persistence pays.

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